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TAMARIND Seed

Spies and Romance

By Gary Arnold

In the early moments of "The Tamarind Seed," now at the K-B Apex, a colleague asks Omar Sharif how his vacation on Barbados is going and Sharif replies, "Dull, but certainly restful." Those words come back to haunt the movie.

"The Tamarind Seed" is dreadfully, albeit decorously, dull, a tale of romance and intrigue with both major ingredients left out.

Sharif is cast as a sophisticated, independent-minded KGB man who fronts as a military attache at the Soviet embassy in Paris. His independent streak is indicated by the fact that he dares to vacation on Barbados.

The neighboring bungalow is occupied by Julie Andrews, who clerks at the British Foreign Office and broods a lot about an unhappy marriage (which ended when her husband drove off a cliff to a fiery death, an image that keeps recurring in crimson tints) and a recently terminated love affair.

The suave spy endeavors to ingratiate himself with the gloomy clerk. She steadfastly resists his sexual advances and never exactly cheers up, but his attentions are not entirely in vain. Miss Andrews makes it appear that to the extent her character is capable of enjoying anything, she begins to enjoy, or at least tolerate, the company of her new suitor. Some people may jump to the conclusion that the heroine's personality is rather frosty. Not so. It's just discouragingly lukewarm.

A barely flickering relationship has been drastically misinterpreted, back at the protagonists' respective offices. Anthony Quayle, a severe, suspicious sort from British Intelligence, tells Miss Andrews that Sharif wants to worm classified information out of her.

She looks puzzled, confirming one's impression that this woman isn't privy to information a KGB big-shot could possibly need. The failure to contradict this impression is one of writer-director Blake Edwards' many little slips.

Sharif, already under suspicion because of his liberal tendencies, attempts to conceal his nonpolitical designs on Miss Andrews by pretending she really is a potential informant. When this subterfuge caves in, he's forced to defect, and what began as an innocent and to all appearances unrewarding little flirtation ends up causing turmoil in espionage circles.

The original source, a romantic thriller by Evelyn Anthony, may have conveyed some tangible passion and suspense, but if so, Edwards has failed to transpose such elements to the screen.

"The Tamarind Seed" simply

confirms the impression that the Blake Edwards responsible for "Darling Lili," "The Wild Rovers," "The Carey Treatment" and now this fresh stiff is not the same Blake Edwards who did "Operation Petticoat," "Breakfast at Tiffany's," "The Pink Panther," "A Shot in the Dark," et al.

Once a shrewd and witty commercial filmmaker, Edwards now seems to be a misguided plodder. His taste in material has become stale and wrongheaded, while his style has congealed into a kind of parody of the old genteel, expensive look, with overdressed decor and overly formal camerawork,

marked by rigid set-ups and creamy color.

There's not much the actors can do in their genteel straitjackets. Edwards might have been better off playing the premise for laughs, since playing it straight is a bore.

After a few minutes of the arid "sophisticated" dialogue Sharif and Andrews are compelled to exchange, you want to eavesdrop on another couple, an interesting couple. Edwards makes the film dull in exactly the way everyday life can be dull. The illusion is so perfect that you want to rush out of the theater and try to find a movie.